Bigfoot Evidence: Are These Tracks Real?

MICHAEL R. DENNETT

Controversy is nothing new to participants in the search for the legendary Bigfoot or Sasquatch monster. Grover Krantz, associate professor of anthropology at Washington State University, in Pullman, has often been at the center of the storm that is Sasquatch research. His recent book, *Big Footprints: A Scientific Inquiry into the Reality of Sasquatch* (see review, p. 528), and his promotional efforts on television are sure to keep the controversy boiling.

Part of the objection to Krantz stems from his call for a specimen to be obtained: dead or alive. He has been quoted as saying (Markotic 1984) that once a Bigfoot is killed, the hunter "should cut off the biggest piece you can carry back . . . the head would be best. . . . If less must suffice, half of the lower jaw would be the single, most useful part." Many have assumed that Krantz himself had no intention of killing a Sasquatch. But in *Big Footprints*, Krantz says he actively tried to bag the creature. By driving back roads at night he hoped to spot a Bigfoot. Krantz (1992a: 239) writes: "My usual speed was 25 miles (40 km) per hour. After some practice, I could stop the car, set the brakes, turn on the extra lights, pick up and load the gun, and be standing 'at point' outside the car—all in just fifteen seconds."

A smaller group of Bigfoot buffs, including René Dahinden, perhaps the best-known Sasquatch researcher, opposes Krantz on the grounds that he is unscientific. A particular point of contention between Dahinden and Krantz is a set of tracks from the Mill Creek watershed in Oregon's Blue Mountains. Krantz maintains that these big footprints are among the best evidence for Sasquatch. Dahinden

Is a new plaster cast of a 'Bigfoot' footprint from Indiana authentic evidence of a Sasquatch, as Grover Krantz and others proclaim? Our author tracked down the man who sent it to Krantz and here reveals its true origin.

(1993) maintains they are not authentic. "Look," he told me, "any village idiot can see [the Mill Creek] tracks are fake, one-hundred-percent fake!"

At the heart of the issue between Krantz and these other researchers is Krantz's often-asserted position that he cannot be fooled. In a 1992 television interview, reporter John Yager asked Krantz: "How long have you believed there is something out there?" Krantz (1992b) replied:

> The term "believe" usually means an opinion held because it makes you feel good. The first time I ever heard of these things I was about sixteen: I believed it instantly. But did I think they were real: no, no way!
>
> I was here at Washington State University for about two years before I got hold of some direct information. That information amounted to a pair of footprints I saw in the wild. I got casts of the prints and analyzed them. The right and left were quite unlike each other. One was obviously crippled. I analyzed them and decided that the design of the foot that implied crippling was exactly what you would expect for a creature about eight feet tall and enormously heavy.
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> If someone faked [these footprints] with all the subtle hints of anatomy design, he had to be a real

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This photo appeared in the January 18, 1989 *Spokane Spokesman-Review.* Washington State University President Sam Smith (*left*) presents a cast of a Bigfoot footprint to Terry Brown (*right*). Grover Krantz (*center*) looks on. Brown received the cast on behalf of the Community Colleges of Spokane, whose team symbol is the Sasquatch. In the accompanying article, staff writer Dave Hirschman quoted Krantz as saying, "The Sasquatch that made this (footprint) is called 'Big Daddy,' and he is a large male among a group in the Blue Mountains we call the 'Gang of Four.' " Hirschman reported that Krantz said that Big Daddy weighs 800 pounds and stands 8 feet tall.

> genius, an expert at anatomy, very inventive, an original thinker. He had to outclass me in those areas, and I don't think anyone outclasses me in those areas, at least not since Leonardo da Vinci. So I say such a person is impossible, therefore the tracks are real.

Yet Krantz has many supporters within the Bigfoot field. He is also garnering some support from an unlikely quarter: the academic community. Says Krantz (1992a: 246): "Recently the academic climate has greatly improved. [My] major objectors [at WSU] have retired or moved away, some of the other faculty are genuinely interested, my chairman is open-minded and supportive, even the new president of the university finds the subject very interesting."[1]

The case Krantz presents, particularly in his new book, is impressive if the reader assumes he is telling the complete story. But Krantz fails to provide important details associated with the "evidence," and in my view he slants the presentation by omitting pertinent information. His case rests primarily on *his analysis* of two sets of footprints ("Cripple foot" and Mill Creek) and two separate sets of handprints (found by Ivan Marx and Paul Freeman). He has determined that these footprints are unquestionably authentic and that the handprints are most probably real.

To support his position, Krantz introduces a new item of evidence: a single Bigfoot print from Bloomington, Indiana. The Bloomington track is important because it shows dermal ridges and valleys (which on the hand we call fingerprints). I have some surprising information about this track to report. But to understand the significance of this track one first needs to know the controversy whirling about the Mill Creek tracks.

The Mill Creek tracks were discovered in 1982 by Paul Freeman. The tracks, when examined, showed dermal ridges. Based on the ridge detail and his assessment that the anatomy of the tracks is precisely the anticipated shape for a Bigfoot creature, Krantz concluded the tracks were real. Since Krantz first published a paper on the tracks, their authenticity and the credibility of Paul Freeman have come into question. In 1987 Freeman admitted he had tried to fake Bigfoot prints prior to his 1982 discovery of the Mill Creek tracks. In 1989 I wrote an article in this journal (Dennett 1989) detailing evidence strongly suggesting the hoax possibility of the Mill Creek imprints.[2] My article cited an investigation by the Forest Service that concluded the tracks were fakes. Since then more evidence against the authenticity of the tracks has surfaced.

Lonnie Somer, a Washington State University graduate student, made a presentation on Bigfoot hair samples to the annual meeting of the International Society of Cryptozoology. The gathering was hosted by the Department of Anthropology at WSU in June 1989. Somer obtained several hair samples said to be from a Sasquatch, all from the Blue Mountains, of which the Mill Creek watershed is a part. He reported that he made microscopic observations of the cross-sections and shapes of the hairs. He conducted tests of the pattern of the burn and of the smell. In these instances the Sasquatch "hair" differed from human and animal samples. He discovered that no hair follicles or scales were present on his Bigfoot samples, although human and animal hairs showed both follicles and scales. Somer compared the alleged Bigfoot hair with synthetic wig fibers. He found the synthetic fibers varied from the human and animal samples in the same way as the alleged Big-

foot hair. His conclusion was that the Sasquatch hair samples were artificial fibers. When asked what this meant, Somer replied that he believed someone was "perpetrating a [Bigfoot] hoax!"[3]

Krantz mentions Somer's presentation in his book and agrees that it indicates hoax activity in the Blue Mountains. He does not connect the fake hair samples with the Mill Creek tracks, nor did Somer in his presentation. When I asked, Somer (1989) confirmed that he had obtained at least one set of hair samples from a site discovered by Paul Freeman.[4] In view of Freeman's prior history of Bigfoot hoax activity and his subsequent connection to the synthetic hair, his association with the Mill Creek tracks surely put them in question.

Early in 1990, Dahinden approached me with additional information linking Freeman with hoax Sasquatch evidence. Dahinden related that he was present in November 1987 when Freeman "discovered" yet another set of prints.[5] These tracks were found near the junction of Indian Springs Road and Squaw Springs Road in the Blue Mountains, not far from the Mill Creek watershed. Dahinden was immediately suspicious of these imprints, which he called the Indian Springs tracks. The tracks were depressed well into the ground, but when Dahinden stepped near them he barely left a mark. "I took off my shoes and socks and walked around to see what type of impression I might make," he explained (Dahinden 1990). "I didn't leave much of a track, but when I looked closely I could see the imprint of my dermal ridges. Yet the Bigfoot tracks did not show any dermal ridges! I was taking photo-

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René Dahinden shows a track from the Indian Springs find.

graphs and as I attempted to blow some soil out of the toe of one impression I displaced some dirt. The disturbed soil was from the top lip of the footprint impression between the second and third toe. Looking closer I saw a small piece of dirt with a skin pattern [dermal ridges]. It is my view that this skin pattern was made by someone patting down the dirt before pushing more dirt on top."

Dahinden photographed the tracks, and Freeman made plaster casts. It was not until later, when examining the photos, that Dahinden realized a sequence of four consecutive tracks consisted of a left, right, left, and left imprint (see photo).[6]

Significantly Krantz never mentions the Indian Springs tracks in his book. He does talk about five additional sets of footprints discovered by Freeman that he apparently accepts as genuine. He defends Freeman, writing: "Some critics have complained that Freeman should not be the only one finding all those tracks unless he is faking them. Actually some other people I know have found tracks there [the Blue Mountains], and many others may have as well, but they are just telling their friends about them and the information only later filters back to me. Freeman was also spending an inordinate amount of time in this effort before a foot injury curtailed most of his searching" (Krantz 1992a: 82).

Krantz offers no corroborating evidence that Freeman actually spent "an inordinate amount of time" searching for tracks. We do not learn who the "some other people" are that found tracks or anything about these tracks.[7] Krantz does not tell his readers that, besides the many footprints, handprints, hair samples, and encounters with Bigfoot, Freeman claims he also has: discovered twisted tree limbs (a sign of Sasquatch activity), photographed Sasquatch, and most recently, twice recorded Bigfoot with a video camera. Perhaps most curious is the omission of Freeman's find of ancient Indian cave paintings depicting Bigfoot. Surely one would think that an anthropologist would jump at such a discovery.[8]

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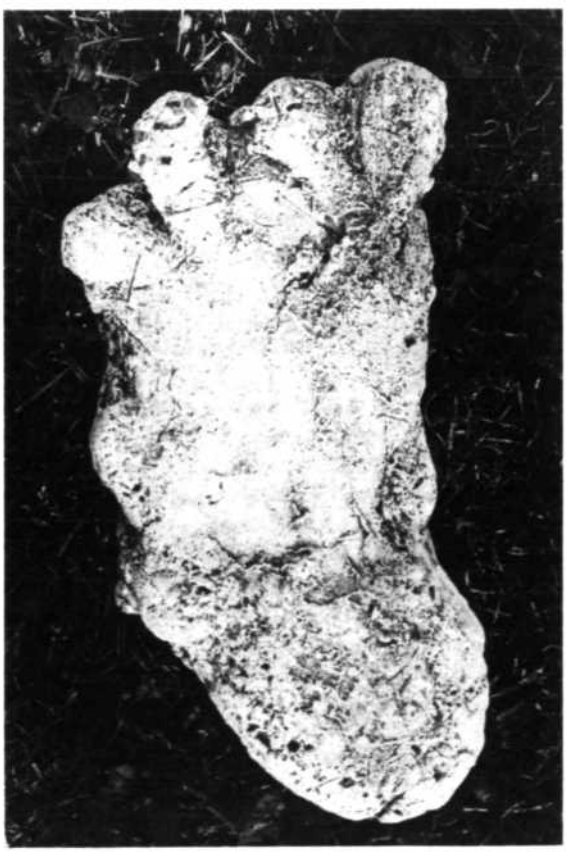
Five casts of tracks from the Indian Springs location. First four casts from front to rear are the four sequential footprints. Note the large bulge of the big toe on the top left of prints one, three, and four.

To shore up the sagging case for the Mill Creek tracks, another set of imprints showing dermal ridges would be helpful. Krantz (1992a: 85-86)

informs his readers that just such a fortuitous discovery has occurred:

> I should mention the dermal ridges in the cast of Cripple foot. My casts were copies of the originals. I showed these to Ed Palma [a fingerprint expert]. He pointed out three patches where he claimed to see traces of ridge detail. I studied those places intently and saw absolutely nothing. Sometime later Rene Dahinden showed me the originals of these casts. In all three places that Palma had indicated I could now see a few faint ridges. Needless to say, this man's professional qualifications are outstanding.

For the full significance of the preceding paragraph, it helps to know the history of the Cripple footprint. Over a thousand tracks were discovered in November and December 1969, near Bossburg, Washington. One pair of footprints were cast. This set, including the right "crippled" foot, is the basis for Krantz's statement that it would be impossible to hoax. Many Bigfoot researchers are not so sure. At the heart of the story is Ivan Marx. Marx participated in the Tom Slick Bigfoot expedition in northern California (1958-1962). After termination of the search Marx moved to Bossburg. He was living there when the tracks began to appear. Although he did not discover any tracks, he was closely associated with several discoveries. Dahinden maintains that the tracks are worthy of consideration. In *Sasquatch* (Hunter and Dahinden 1975: 156), he says he was suspicious of the circumstances. "Why," he writes, "did the tracks happen to be just there, where [I] would be sure to go every day, where [I] checked all the time. . . . It was the obvious place for a hoaxer to plant his work." Suspicions increased when no additional legitimate evidence surfaced despite the obvious repeat presence of the creature. After the Bossburg incident, Marx produced a film of what he said was a large Sasquatch creature. The first film was followed by several more, and his credibility suffered. The Marx films have failed to gain any significant acceptance within the Bigfoot community. Even Krantz rejects the



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One of the Bossburg, Washington, footprints, better known as the "Cripple foot."

Marx films. Writing to Dahinden in May 1975, Krantz (1975) says: "You are right about my falling for the Marx film, for a while anyway."

But Krantz lacks reservations about the Cripple foot. Until the Mill Creek tracks were discovered, Krantz maintained that, besides the Patterson film, the Cripple-foot tracks were the best evidence for Bigfoot—the best evidence *because* his analysis established the tracks as genuine. Now he tells us the Cripple foot shows dermal ridges.

I called Dahinden, who has the original Cripple foot cast, and asked him if he saw dermal ridges. He told me that there were two small areas that *might be interpreted* as dermal ridges. He added that if they were ridges they could be artifacts of a human hand transferred to the cast before the mold was completely dry. A few weeks later I examined the original myself. Using a magnifying glass I studied the entire imprint. I was unable to discern any dermal ridges.

Krantz's claim of anatomical precision in the shape of the Cripple foot also calls for examination. I contacted Dennis Trune, an anatomist and an associate professor at the Oregon Health Sciences University. Trune had been intrigued by an article by Krantz and had contacted him in 1988. Trune (1988) told me that Krantz "knows his anatomy, is well read on its anthropomorphic ramifications, and his theorizing is not bizarre." Still, he questions Krantz's approach. "I find it difficult to believe," Trune wrote, "that one can tell the location of the ankle (tibio-talus) joint, which is on the top of the foot, from imprints of the bottom of the foot." He continued, "Frankly, I never could make out what he was calling the ball(s) impressions from the photograph because he doesn't label the picture." Trune concludes: "His [Krantz's] writings don't do anything to prove Sasquatch one way or the other."

The Krantz approach to Bigfoot research is to verify "evidence" for the creature through anatomical analysis. He presents his analysis as objective fact. Another pattern in his approach is to accept multiple items of "evidence" from the same person. In 1970 when Marx "discovered" several Sasquatch handprints, Krantz (1971) found the anatomy consistent with a Bigfoot creature. Now, in his most recent book, he presents a second series of handprints, found by Freeman. Krantz (1992a: 66) writes: "The gross anatomy of the handprints shows one feature of special interest because it was almost totally unexpected. The five available casts, representing four individuals from two locations, all show a nonopposed thumb."

The conclusion that the Sasquatch has a nonopposed thumb must be viewed as an extraordinary development.[9] Krantz gives no indication that he has support from other scientists for his analysis of the Marx and Freeman handprints. Explaining why he thinks the handprints are real, Krantz (1992a: 66-67) says: "The combination of a nonopposed thumb with the absence of a thenar pad is anatomically consistent. If this is a hoax, the perpetrator had to be very familiar with a variety of primate hands, most of which do have opposed thumbs and thenar pads, while some are lacking both. And this is above and beyond all the other physical problems of producing such fakes."

I sent Daris Swindler, professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Washington, a copy of the chapter on handprints. Swindler is an expert in primate anthropology. Later I talked with Swindler (1993) and asked him what he thought about the handprints and the aspect of the

nonopposed thumb. He replied: "I don't know what he's talking about!"

Concerning the handprints, Krantz allows the possibility, however slight, that they are not authentic. There are at least three sets of footprints that he insists cannot be fakes. These are the Cripple foot (1992a: 63), he says: "In my judgment, no hoaxer could have figured out just how far forward to shift the ankle for a biped of the indicated size, then have left footprints with some subtle distortions that just *might* lead an anatomist to the reconstruction I made. I figured the whole thing out after studying the footprints; any hoaxer had to plan it all out from nothing. This requires an expert anatomist with a very inventive mind, more so than me, and I seriously doubt that any such person exists."

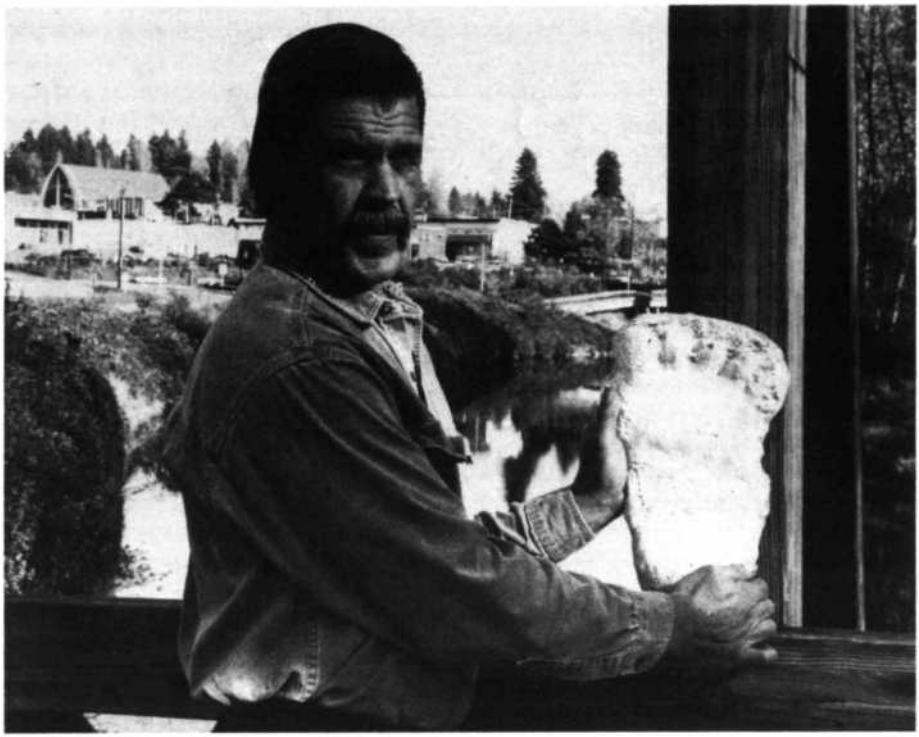
When the Mill Creek tracks were discovered, Krantz made similar claims of authenticity. He added that there were two Sasquatch traits visible in the Mill Creek tracks that verified they were genuine. He chose to keep these two traits secret to distinguish future real tracks from fakes.

Krantz (1992a: 84) writes that, in May 1990, "a construction worker sent me a cast from southern Indiana. This was the first tangible evidence from east of the Rockies that I have been able to examine first hand. Bob Titmus, who is very alert to the possibility of faked tracks, studied this one carefully and decided it had all the signs of a legitimate imprint from a living foot. I also brought the cast to the San Diego Police Department, where Ed Palma and his colleagues pronounced the several patches of ridge detail as consistent with a real primate foot of that size, almost 14 inches long (35 cm). They all agreed that no human foot could have made that imprint. It also showed the two sasquatch traits that I have never revealed to anyone." Later in the book (Krantz 1992a: 200) he again mentions the Bloomington track, stating: "It was examined by the tracker Bob Titmus, and the fingerprinter Ed Palma, the two best experts available, and both thought it looked genuine. The track also passed all my criteria, published and private, that distinguish sasquatch tracks from human tracks and from fakes."

The Bloomington track, if real, is a valuable item of supporting data for the Mill Creek tracks. In the Bloomington track we see all the elements that, to Krantz, guarantee authenticity: his analysis of the anatomy, corroboration from a fingerprint expert, and the endorsement of a tracking expert.

I was surprised when I first read the passages above quoting Titmus, as I knew that he was skeptical of both the Mill Creek and Cripple-foot tracks. Yet Krantz never mentions in his book that one of the "two best experts available" does not endorse his two most important pieces of evidence.

I contacted Titmus and asked him about the statements attributed to him concerning the Bloomington track. He agreed to an interview but asked that I identify him not as a skeptic but as having seen positive evidence for Bigfoot. Titmus (1993) then told me that the quotes in the book were probably literally true.[10] At the time, he did not see anything wrong with the cast but he stressed that *no conclusion of authenticity could be made from a single footprint*, even if the print could be viewed where found! The statement that "he agreed that no human foot could have made [the] imprint" was possibly misleading. He said that if the track was a fake it would have been made by hand, not by using one's foot. He



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Cliff Crook, a longtime Bigfoot buff, holds a copy of the Bloomington track. He doubted the track was authentic.

added that he did not claim to be an "expert." Looking at the photo in his copy of the book as we talked, he said, "I'm a little suspicious of the appearance of the toes."

Titmus (1993) told me that the Mill Creek, Cripple-foot, and Marx and Freeman handprints were "probably the worst evidence for Bigfoot." He said he was "positive the Freeman handprints were fake and that he had grave doubts about the Marx handprints."[11]

I also talked with Ed Palma. Palma is the "expert" who allegedly spotted ridge detail in the Cripple-foot print. Asked about the Mill Creek Sasquatch tracks (Palma 1993), he said he felt they were authentic. He agreed with Krantz that the tracks could be tagged as real, independent of any other data. He recognized there were ways a track with dermal ridges could be faked. In the case of the Mill Creek tracks he felt faking was highly unlikely. He told me that of all Sasquatch tracks he has examined he was unable to identify any as positively fake. When asked specifically about the Bloomington track, he said he could not remember the details of that specific imprint. He said that he was certain of the authenticity *only* of the Mill Creek tracks. He added, "I wouldn't say I can't be fooled."

What of the anatomy of the Bloomington track?

Krantz assures us the track "passed all my criteria" including the "two sasquatch traits that I have never revealed to anyone." Since we do not know what these "two traits" might be, it is difficult to imagine how one could evaluate the professor's asser-

tion of authenticity. It occurred to me that one other person might be able to give information regarding the track: the unnamed construction worker who sent the cast to Krantz.

According to Krantz (1992a: 85) "The man who sent this Indiana track provided me with only a brief description of the footprint circumstances, and has since moved to an undisclosed location. He indicated that he wanted nothing more to do with the 'damned thing,' and cannot be reached for any further communication on the subject." Through my contacts I learned that the cast had been sent to Krantz by J. W. Parker. Parker had moved to another state and he did not want anything more to do with the cast. Krantz was almost correct when he asserted that Parker "cannot be reached."

After an eight-month effort, I was able to talk with Parker, then living on the East Coast. He told me the footprint was a fake. He knew this because he had made the imprint and the cast! Originally he had intended only to see if Krantz could, as he bragged, "differentiate between [a track] made artificially or naturally." Parker said he now feels the thing has gone too far and regrets he made the [Bloomington] track. I asked how it had been made. "It took about twenty minutes to form the print in the mud," he said. The dermal ridges came from his foot and hands, placed in areas where the "least amount of wear or abrasion would occur." What about the "two traits"? "Oh," Parker replied, "I wasn't sure about that. I thought they might be toenails and scars, so I added both." Parker also told me he made "the ball of the foot appear deeper near the inside of the foot to simulate the weight-bearing area during a light push-off." At the last minute, he embedded the shell of an American black walnut where the fifth toe would have been to make the print look more realistic.[12]

Throughout my investigation into the Bloomington track I received help from many people who think there is a Sasquatch. Most of these "researchers" feel other "evidence" provides better support for the existence of the Bigfoot creature. One of these, Cliff Crook (1993), summed up the issue: "Science is about discovering the truth. It is evident that Grover Krantz has consistently abused his scientific credentials by his constant failure to acknowledge plain facts."

Notes

1. Krantz (1983: 71-72) writes: "Thus far, every specialist who has examined these casts [Mill Creek] agrees that their detailed anatomy has all the characteristics and appearance of being derived from an imprint of primate skin. These include thirty police fingerprint workers, . . . six physical anthropologists . . . four pathologists and two zoologists."

2. In that article I quoted Dahinden as comparing the Hitler diaries scam to the Mill Creek tracks. In quoting him I wrote: "It turns out that the ink was not invented until 1954." In fact, it was a discrepancy in the paper, not the ink, that proved the diaries fake. This was my error, not Dahinden's. I also reported I had been told that Freeman had once worked for an orthopedic-shoe company. At the 1989 International Society of Cryptozoology (ISC) meeting Freeman told me he had never worked in the shoe industry. Later when I asked him to release a government employment file, which could have substantiated his denial, he declined. In fairness I should add that despite considerable effort, I was never able to verify this employment with any custom shoe firm.

3. For more information on this issue, see Winn 1991: 55-65.

4. See also Somer 1987: 65-70.

5. Ray and Derek Nab were also present at the time. I talked with Ray Nab and he collaborated Dahinden's account of the find.

6. For a favorable account of Freeman's discoveries, see Orchard 1993.

7. One of the "other" people finding Sasquatch "evidence" in the Blue Mountains is Wes Sumerlin. In addition to encounters and footprints, Sumerlin is reported to have seen a giant UFO and experienced "missing time" while looking for Bigfoot in the Blue

Mountains. Considering the size of the area encompassing the Blue Mountains, the number of sightings have been few. In contrast, a Pennsylvania Bigfoot group reports 100 Sasquatch incidents involving 250 eyewitnesses in their state in a single year!

8. I learned of the alleged discovery of the Indian cave paintings in a telephone conversation with Paul Freeman (1990). At the time he complained to me that he could not interest anyone in examing the paintings. According to one account (Orchard 1990: 117), Krantz said the pictographs were "just something that cannot be evaluated." Freeman says he also found "scratch" marks, Sasquatch feces, and "a section of an elk hide with huge teeth marks embedded in it" (Orchard 1990: 159).

9. Krantz (1983: 76) argues that Sasquatch must be a "higher primate" because of the dermal ridges. "The skin [showing dermal ridges] makes it [Bigfoot] a higher primate, without specifying monkey, ape or man." If Bigfoot is a higher primate then the nonopposed thumb seems to this writer to be an incredibly unlikely anatomical configuration.

10. In my discussion with Titmus he said that he did not want to be represented as a Bigfoot skeptic even though he was skeptical of the particular evidence I was researching. Titmus said he was convinced that Bigfoot exists. On at least a dozen occasions, he said, he had been able to track the elusive creature. He explained that the tracking had been of different individuals often for a mile or more. In one instance he tracked a creature for 3½ miles before losing the trail. Titmus also mentioned the Patterson film as authentic, as well as his personal sighting of a Sasquatch on two occasions.

11. Krantz never mentions Titmus's conerns regarding the key footprints or the Marx handprint. However, he writes: "In the late 1980s Paul Freeman brought in some casts of hand imprints from the Blue Mountains. His description of the circumstances that he gave to Bob Titmus was rather different, which has raised some concern about their authenticity."

12. I learned about Parker from two Sasquatch investigators: Doug McCoy and Art Kapa. They said Parker had told them he had made a fake track and sent it to Krantz. The same year, 1990, Parker showed them a letter from Krantz acknowledging receipt of the track. I later obtained a copy of the letter. They related that Parker had subsequently telephoned and had identified the track as the one in Krantz's book. They said they were unable to give me Parker's address. I finally contacted Parker by phone on August 29, 1993.

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Michael R. Dennett is a veteran investigator into claimed evidence for Bigfoot, UFOs, and other matters. The SKEPTICAL INQUIRER has published several of his reports of earlier investigations. He was recently named a CSICOP Scientific/Technical Consultant.